



## Partnering With Parents to Communicate the Importance of Childhood Immunizations

### Public Health Problem

Almost one million children in the United States live without the benefits of full immunization. For these children, the risk of serious illness and even death from vaccine-preventable diseases is great. Although northern Manhattan has a young population (1 of 10 people is younger than 5 years of age), it lags behind the rest of the city in protecting its children from the risk of infectious diseases. In 1999, only half of the children under 3 years of age in northern Manhattan had received all recommended vaccines.

### Evidence That Prevention Works

Research has demonstrated that immunizations against common vaccine-preventable diseases can prevent disease and benefit not only those who receive them, but also those who have not been vaccinated because immunized people cannot spread these diseases to others. As a result, many childhood diseases that were considered a normal part of growing up in the 1940s and 1950s are now preventable and occur rarely.

### Program Example

The Northern Manhattan Start Right Program is an innovative immunization program. While national programs focus heavily on providers, the Start Right Program established a strong community and family-based approach. The CDC-funded Northern Manhattan Start Right Coalition, a coalition of 17 social service organizations, trained 590 staff and community residents to promote childhood immunizations with parents. Those who are trained talk one-on-one with parents as they register for health insurance coverage for their children, parenting programs, childcare programs, Head Start programs, WIC visits, housing association meetings, or church events. Parents are invited to join the program and the trained staff member explains when their child's shots are due and why the shots are important. Both immunization registries and the child vaccination cards are used to monitor whether enrolled children received their shots. Parents are congratulated when their children complete all childhood vaccinations on time. Since the program was launched, almost 2,000 parents have enrolled.

### Implications

The Northern Manhattan Start Right Program demonstrates the importance of integrating health promotion activities into the routine activities of community and social service organizations as an effective strategy for reaching families not easily reached by health systems.

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